

I believe our nation's missions in Afghanistan and Iraq will have a major impact on our national security for decades to come. While significant challenges remain in both places, I believe the United States and the world are safer as a result of their transformations from hostile regimes that supported terror and suppressed human rights, to developing democracies and U.S. allies in the war against radical jihadists.

A stable and secure Afghanistan and Iraq would represent major successes in this global war, and would be the best way to honor the men and women of our armed forces who have made great sacrifices in these missions.

In Afghanistan, I support President Obama's decision to honor the request of General David Petraeus, who oversees the mission, for more U.S. troops and creating a refined strategy to improve the situation in that country. We must work with our NATO allies to defeat the Taliban and al Qaeda terrorists, train Afghan forces, and further strengthen the current pro-U.S. government. We must also work with Pakistan to defeat terrorists residing in lawless areas of that country that wreak havoc in Afghanistan and beyond.

As we do so, I believe it's critical to remember that prior to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Taliban provided safer harbor for al Qaeda.

If they return to power, al Qaeda could once again have a sanctuary in Afghanistan where they can plot new terrorist attacks on American soil.

On the other hand, the development of a strong American ally in Afghanistan will strengthen our security by denying terrorist groups a valuable place to operate.

We cannot lose sight of the importance of this mission as we strengthen our efforts there.

Likewise, I believe we must remain steadfast in completing our mission in Iraq. Absent the support of our troops, the Iraqi government could still collapse, creating a dangerous power struggle whereby Iran and al Qaeda would likely seek to take control of certain areas of the country.

Alternatively, I believe that a stable, secure Iraq would bolster our security by being an important ally

in the world's most volatile region and standing strong as a democratic power.

Further, I believe it is essential to remember that the substantial security and political gains from recent years are reversible.

With that in mind, I am pleased that President Obama appears determined to follow the recommendations of U.S. commanders on the ground as he moves forward with plans to reduce U.S. troops in Iraq as conditions improve.

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